Report on the Future of *Albion*

For many years NACBS has sponsored two scholarly journals, the *Journal of British Studies*, founded in 1961, and *Albion*, founded in 1969. Although launched partly with a private endowment, *JBS* has always been directly controlled by NACBS (or its predecessor CBS), which appoints its editors. Subscriptions to *JBS* are separate from NACBS membership dues, although for some years the University of Chicago Press has managed subscriptions to both, offering members the opportunity either to belong to the organization without subscribing or to couple membership with a subscription to *JBS. JBS* has approximately 1400 subscribers, of which roughly 800 are institutional and 600 are individual.

During its first twenty-five years *Albion* was an independent journal, sponsored, but not directly owned by NACBS. Initially edited by Joel M. Rodney and published at Elmira College, it moved in 1973 to Appalachian State University, when Michael Moore became Managing Editor. Five years later Michael assumed the editorship, but despite accountability to NACBS for expenses, the organization did not have authority over the terms of his appointment. In 1996 this anomalous arrangement was ended under a contractual arrangement with Appalachian State University, which agreed to continue to provide editorial support, while yielding legal control of the journal to NACBS. The settlement negotiated with the University was based on the assumption that Michael would remain as Editor, but that his appointment would be for renewable terms in line with the policy for Editors of *JBS*. The officers of NACBS, acting on behalf of the Council, made it clear to Michael that he could continue to serve as long as he chose to do so. Last year he announced that after 2003 he would no longer commission articles for issues through 2004, and that he would retire from the editorship in 2005.

In contrast to *JBS*, *Albion* has been directly subsidized by NACBS from membership dues. In return, all members of NACBS receive Albion as part of their membership package, without any additional subscription charge. NACBS provides the journal with an amount based on a per capita assessment of members, which, since 1996 has varied from

year to year, ranging from $16,000 to a high of $24,000 in 2001. The amount per member has increased during the past decade because of rising publication costs, but has also fluctuated in line with with membership figures. It is impossible to determine the exact amount allocated in any year because Editor's reports and Treasurer's reports differ depending on when they are calculated. The best estimate suggests that *Albion*'s subvention has averaged approximately $20,000 per year during the past decade. This represents somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of NACBS's annual revenues, and the subvention from NACBS constitutes somewhere between one-third and one-half of *Albion*'s income, the balance coming primarily from institutional subscriptions. *Albion*'s subscription list is slightly smaller than that of *JBS*--about 1350. These include roughly 900 members' "free" subscriptions and over 400 institutional subscriptions, about half the number of institutional subscriptions that *JBS* has, but a significantly larger number of individual recipients. To put it another way, all members receive *Albion* automatically, while approximately two-thirds of members opt to subscribe to *JBS*.

The two journals serve a similar readership but in rather different ways. *JBS* has from its inception been a competitive, prestigious, peer-reviewed journal that ordinarily includes four substantial scholarly articles plus two review essays in every issue. It has attempted to cover all periods and to incorporate articles covering topics in areas of British studies outside history. *JBS* has attained a distinguished reputation abroad, and during the forty years of its existence has established itself as the dominant American scholarly journal in British history. *Albion* began by publishing papers and abstracts of papers delivered at national and regional British studies meetings. Under Michael Moore's editorship, it transformed itself into a peer-reviewed, academic journal, publishing scholarly articles and book reviews. While *Albion* is seen by some people as less selective in the articles it publishes than *JBS*, its role as a site for book reviews is unmatched. By publishing 260-290 reviews a year, *Albion* has made itself the most comprehensive source for reviews in British history, certainly in the United States, if not in Britain as well. Many readers feel that book reviewing has been *Albion*'s distinctive contribution to British studies, providing an essential guide for scholars and students to books published in the field. Like *JBS*, *Albion* publishes

articles covering the entire span of British history, but generally on more traditional topics than *JBS*, which attempts to follow current trends in British studies, including post-imperial history, cultural studies, and gender scholarship. *Albion* also publishes the NACBS presidential address biennially, as well as occasional pedagogical articles and bibliographical surveys. There is an unwarranted perception that *Albion* tends to publish work of graduate students and junior scholars, whereas *JBS* publishes the work of more established scholars. In fact, the proportion of younger scholars is about the same in both journals, and both provide a valuable function by encouraging and publishing the work of novices in the field, who need the recognition that publication in an established journal gives them. Both journals publish about the same number of articles a year--13-16--but *JBS* has eschewed comprehensive book reviewing, preferring instead to include lengthy review essays covering several--and sometimes a large number--of books on a regular basis. Neither journal provides information about conferences or obituaries of British historians, although *Albion* served that function initially. That role was delegated primarily to the *British Studies Intelligencer* and, more recently, to the NACBS web site.

Michael's forthcoming retirement provides an opportunity for re-assessing the future of *Albion*, since, if it is to continue, new leadership and institutional sponsorship will need to be found. Since this report reflects only the opinions of its three members, it seems advisable to explore several options rather than to recommend a particular course of action to the Council.

The first option would be to cease publishing *Albion* at the conclusion of Michael's term. Since there is no sentiment in favor of reducing the number of articles published under the aegis of NACBS or eliminating the journal's book reviewing activity, this option would necessarily imply the expansion of *JBS* to include more articles and reviews. While the bulk of the subvention might be saved and would therefore accrue to NACBS for other purposes (e.g. grants and fellowships, speakers, prizes), it would likely prove necessary to use some of the organization's revenues for a larger *JBS*, or to increase subscription costs dramatically. One rationale for ending the journal is the recent proliferation of other journals that publish articles in British history or studies more

broadly conceived, e.g. the *Journal of Victorian Culture*, the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, *Twentieth Century British History*, *Gender and History*, and others. While editors of many journals--although apparently not *JBS*--have experienced a decrease in the number of submissions in recent years, it is difficult to determine whether this is a temporary or long-term trend. Aside from new, more specialized journals, H-Albion has greatly increased its book reviewing, thereby serving some of the same function provided by *Albion*, although the committee recognizes that many readers prefer print to on-line reviews. It should be noted that neither of the current Editors of *JBS* favors eliminating *Albion* or enlarging *JBS*. They are reluctant to sacrifice review essays for the type of short reviews that *Albion* publishes; they are concerned about the potential additional cost; and they foresee the need of a full-time book review editor. Further, they argue that, with pressure on junior faculty and graduate students to publish, foreclosing an important outlet would be a disservice to the profession, a view shared by members of the committee. Finally, the editors contend that the differences between the journals would make it difficult to amalgamate without losing the distinctive characteristics of *JBS*.

The second option would be to leave the current arrangements essentially intact, i.e. to continue to provide a large and growing subvention under a new editor who could bring sufficient institutional support. It may be that receiving *Albion* is one of the attractions of NACBS membership and that to consider its elimination would jeopardize membership figures at a time of dwindling insitutional support for British studies. There is as yet little evidence that the drain on NACBS resources is unmanageable given the current financial circumstances of the organization, although it might become so were costs to rise or membership to decline further. Committee members agree that publishing *Albion* is one of the most useful things the organization does. The advantages of continuing to publish *Albion* are obvious: the maintenance of an outlet for young and more established scholars to publish their work in a reputable journal, the perpetuation of comprehensive reviewing, and the increased visibility of British studies through two, as opposed to a single, journal.

A third option would be to perpetuate *Albion* but on a

different financial basis. This would have the advantage of continuing to publish the journal but at a smaller direct cost to the organization. What we have in mind is a new publishing arrangement whereby a publisher either took over both journals, offering them to the membership under a differential dues structure, but phasing out the "free" subscription to members and largely, if not totally, eliminating the subvention. In the event that *JBS* continues its present arrangements with the University of Chicago Press, the NACBS executive might seek a publisher willing to take charge of *Albion* on its own, although that might prove more cumbersome and financially disadvantageous than finding a publisher that would offer a combined package including membership and either or both journals. Since there have been expressions of interest in one or both journals by several publishers, this might be an opportune moment to renegogiate publishing agreements at some financial advantage to the organization.

A fourth option would be to consider making *Albion* an entirely electronic journal, focusing especially on book reviews. We have not pursued this option seriously, since none of us can figure out how this might be done, the extent to which its functions would overlap with H-Albion or an electronic *Intelligencer*, and what costs might be incurred.

Both the committee and the editors of *Albion* and *JBS* believe that no decision should be taken that might involve the ending of *Albion* without consulting the membership of NACBS.

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